

**A Formative Evaluation of a Rural Pennsylvania School District's  
Dispositional Hiring Practices**

by

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# **A Formative Evaluation of a Rural Pennsylvania School District's Dispositional Hiring Practices**

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The purpose of this inquiry was to conduct a formative evaluation of a rural Pennsylvania school district's dispositional hiring practices. The review of literature includes disposition evaluation methods and summarizes the controversial nature of evaluating dispositions. Interviews of administrators who ask dispositional questions, and newly hired teachers who answered dispositional questions, were conducted to explore perceptions of dispositional hiring practices. Data from the interviews were coded to identify themes. Administrators in this study indicated dispositional questions are helpful to include in the interview protocol, improve their confidence in their hiring decisions, and assist with consistency across members of the interview panel. Acceptance was a common theme from teachers, who indicated dispositional questions made the interview feel more like a conversation than an interview, which made them more comfortable and less nervous. Teachers also indicated dispositional questions implied the district valued them as an individual, which positively impacted their perception of the district. Recommendations include further administrator training on dispositional questions, implementing an annual review of interview protocols to ensure alignment with the strategic plan and profile of a graduate, and continued conversations with teachers following employment interviews.

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## **1.0 Introduction**

Hiring teachers is a challenging and important decision school leaders make. When school leaders hire ineffective teachers, not only is student achievement stunted but administrators are consumed with process by which ineffective teachers are remediated and/or terminated (Yariv, 2009). With the looming teacher shortage (AAEE, 2017; Cowan, Goldhaber, Hayes, & Theobald, 2016; Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016), it is important for district leaders to understand qualities that contribute to teacher effectiveness as the weight of accountability and teacher effectiveness have raised the stakes of the quality of education we provide to our students.

Teacher effectiveness is the single most important influence on student achievement (Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2012; Chetty et al., 2011; Rivkin, Hanushek, Kain, & Kain, 2005; Rockoff, 2004). Teacher accountability and value-added measurements of teacher effectiveness have shaped how we define effective teachers and provided a significant amount of data by which we compare students, teachers, districts, states, and our nation to others. Our growing achievement gap (Ornstein, 2010) highlights the need for effective teachers for all students.

When teachers are ineffective, it is the role of the school leaders to provide remediation and, if unsuccessful, terminate the employee. Terminating a teacher can cost several hundred thousand dollars (Eltman, 2008; Klein, 2015). When administrators are consumed with the process of remediation and termination, they have less time to spend as instructional leaders. Administrators lose the ability to work with all of their teachers and instead, must concentrate their time and effort on ineffective teachers (Yariv, 2009).

Identifying research-based qualities of effective educators during the interview process increases the likelihood of selecting the best teacher candidates (Stronge & Hindman, 2006). In addition to interview questions, administrators use grade point averages (GPAs), transcripts, certification exam scores, portfolios, and letters of reference to evaluate candidates' pedagogical skills and content knowledge. Coming to know the teacher's values, attitudes and beliefs, or dispositions, is much more subjective and can be difficult to evaluate (Masunaga & Lewis, 2011; Notar, Riley, Taylor, Thornburg, & Cargill, 2009; Stewart & Davis, 2009; Wasicsko, Wirtz, & Resor, 2009; Wilkerson & Lang, 2007; Wilson & Cameron, 1996).

## **1.1 Context**

My professional experience has solely been working in the field of special education in the district where this inquiry will take place. I have served a number of roles in the district throughout my employment, including high school learning support teacher, transition coordinator, high school department chair, K-12 department chair, and my current position, assistant director of special education. As a result of these varied positions, I have been involved in hiring committees for over a decade.

This inquiry will take place in a rural school district in Pennsylvania with approximately 2,600 students, 225 professional staff, and 130 support service personnel. The district hires an average of 10 to 12 professional staff members each year, despite declining enrollment over the last decade. The district primarily draws regional applicants from the local teacher preparation programs, of which there are four located within a 20-mile radius.

## **1.2 Statement of Problem**

During the interview process, interview teams have a small window in which to evaluate a candidate's content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and dispositions, which can be described as one's values, attitudes, and beliefs. The district's hiring process is based on the work of Stronge and Hindman (2006), adapting the protocols to meet the needs of the vacant positions each year. Beginning in 2017, the district replaced Stronge and Hindman's "teacher as a person" questions with dispositional questions based on the work of Wasicsko (2002).

## **1.3 Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand the impact dispositional interview questions have had on teachers and administrators in a rural Pennsylvania school district. Complex problems, according to Snowden and Boone (2007), require methods that generate ideas in order for patterns to emerge. This inquiry is designed to help generate information regarding the implementation of dispositional interview questions which can serve as a starting point for better understanding the system that produces the current outcomes (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu, 2015). The district has not formally evaluated its hiring practices, and as such, this inquiry will serve as a formative evaluation.

## **1.4 Inquiry Questions**

The focus of this inquiry is to generate knowledge regarding the use of dispositional interview questions in the district in which I work. I will explore the perspectives of not just the administrators asking the dispositional questions, but also the individual teachers who, as candidates, answered the dispositional questions. The research questions that will guide this study are:

1. How do dispositional interview questions affect administrators hiring decisions?
2. How does the use of dispositional interview questions affect the new hire's perception of the district?
3. What lessons have been learned as the district implemented the use of dispositional hiring practices?

## **2.0 Review of Literature**

Teacher effectiveness, which focuses on various aspects of content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and dispositions, has been studied many times over the last several decades. While identifying a teacher's content and pedagogical knowledge during the interview process is important, it is not as difficult as coming to know a teacher's disposition. M. Mark Wasicsko wrote about this topic in "The 20 Minute Hiring Assessment," noting that teachers do not fail because they do not have adequate teaching skills or knowledge of their subject, but they fail because they do not have the right dispositions (2004). He further explains that "it is difficult, if not impossible, to change an adult's disposition" (p. 40). This idea is further supported by Nixon, Packard, and Douvanis (2010) stating that "even if an educator meets acceptable criteria of both knowledge and skills, if they lack the necessary dispositions to work with students, they are unlikely to be considered highly qualified or effective" (p. 48). The authors stated in their survey of principals that the number one reason why probationary teachers were not recommended for renewal were "ethical violations and inappropriate conduct" (Nixon et al., 2010). Osguthrope (2013) supports the idea that dispositions are often the underlying problem between mentors and student teachers, rather than content knowledge or methodological skill of the student teacher.

Effective teachers have significantly different dispositions than ineffective teachers (Combs & Soper, 1963; Evans, 2002; Giovannelli, 2003; Notar et al., 2009). Teachers' dispositions towards themselves, their students, and the teaching profession affect the impact teachers have on their students (Collinson, Killeavy, & Stephenson, 1998; Combs, 1982). Over time, educator dispositions have become integrated into national teaching standards, including the

National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Educators 2008 Standards and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, as well as teacher preparation programs.

School leaders must be able to identify the values, attitudes, and beliefs of effective teachers in the interview process. The knowledge and skills of effective teachers are easily evaluated during the interview process by using a variety of measurements, including grade point average, scores on certification exams, and specific content and pedagogical questions during the interview. Evaluating dispositions is much more subjective and little guidance is provided about measuring dispositions (Schulte, Edick, Edwards, & Mackiel, 2008). Training administrators in assessing dispositions through the interview process can help identify effective teacher candidates (Wasicsko, 1977, 2004).

## **2.1 Standards for Professional Dispositions**

A number of professional organizations incorporate educator dispositions into their accreditation standards. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) includes dispositions in their first standard, defining the acceptable disposition as one of someone who “demonstrate(s) classroom behaviors that are consistent with the ideal of fairness and the belief that all students can learn” (2008). Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC) also included dispositions in their accreditation standards by evaluating candidates on their ability to “acquire the dispositions and skills of critical reflection that will support life-long learning in their field” (2003). While this specific standard does not address the “attitudes, values and beliefs,” woven throughout the standards are elements of “caring and effective” teaching skills.

In 2013, NCATE and TEAC merged to form the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP). The updated standards permit the teacher preparation program to monitor additional criteria including “attributes and dispositions” but does not provide an operational definition of dispositions and instead focuses heavily on candidate content and pedagogical knowledge (CAEP, 2016).

The Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium, a branch of the Council of Chief State School Officers, released Model Core Teaching Standards, which include dispositions in the following areas: “collaboration, communication, creativity/innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, cultural competence, individual differences, leadership, multiple perspectives, professional learning, and teacher responsibility” (2011).

The National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC) has released a Model Code of Ethics for Educators, which includes dispositions, focusing on ethical decision making, equitable educational opportunities for all students, and professional reflection and ongoing professional development. Additionally, The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards incorporates dispositions into their standards, which include “treating students equitably, flexibility, reflective of his/her teaching, and respecting diversity” (2016).

## **2.2 Research-Based Dispositions**

The lack of a clear definition of educator dispositions in professional organizations mirrors the vast number of dispositions that have been studied and determined to be characteristics of effective teachers. Teacher dispositions have been described differently in a number of studies



and as a result, dispositions can be very difficult to evaluate. The purpose of this section is not to provide a comprehensive list of dispositions unique to each discipline but to demonstrate the vast range of research that has been conducted in the area of dispositions.

The values, attitudes and beliefs of educators have been studied in specific disciplines including early childhood education (Katz, 1993; Rike & Sharp, 2009), online educators (Kirwan & Roumell, 2015), mathematics educators (Nolan, 2012), science teachers (Arsal, 2017), special educators (Beverly, Santos, & Kyger, 2006) and art teachers (Evans-Palmer, 2016).

Taylor and Wasicsko (2000) conducted a literature review on dispositions in response to the 2000 NCATE standards and the NBPT Standards (1998) in an attempt to identify the dispositions in the literature related to effective teaching. The authors included a number of studies spanning several decades that identified as many as fifteen dispositions of effective teachers and as few as four. The authors contend that “effective teachers are effective people” (p. 9) and are “warm and caring, they enjoy life, and they are enthusiastic about helping other people grow and develop” (p. 9).

Creating consensus about the meaning of the professional accreditation standards definitions of dispositions by teacher educators is ongoing. Teacher educators across the country form committees and focus groups to create their own operational definition of effective dispositions and determine how to develop and measure dispositions to meet accreditation requirements, a process that can be long and arduous. For example, faculty members at Charleston Southern University took four years to develop a definition of dispositions and determine the role they would play in their teacher preparation program (Karges-Bone & Griffin, 2009). Ultimately, six dispositions emerged from the group’s work: professional responsibility, school and technical

operations, learning community, communication and collaboration, responsive to diversity, and professional commitment and integrity (pp. 29-20).

Rike and Sharp (2009) identified the following dispositions for the creation of the Early Childhood Behavior and Disposition Checklist by the Early Childhood Program's faculty at the University of Memphis: (a) demonstrating commitment; (b) changing circumstances to meet students' needs; (c) respect for and sensitivity to individual students' varied perspectives; (d) being committed to ensuring all students' learning; (e) working professionally with others; (f) treating all students fairly and equally; (g) positive attitudes including passion, enthusiasm, and honesty; and (h) demonstrating accountability for students' learning. The checklist is primarily used by faculty members to assess teacher candidates' dispositions but is also used by teacher candidates as self-assessments.

In a literature review on teacher candidates perceptions of professional dispositions, Gallavan, Peace, and Ryel Thomason (2009) presented the following dispositions: positive attitudes including fairness, respect, reliability, responsibility, passion, and honesty. Comparing candidates' ranking of seventeen professional dispositions to the four teaching goals of the Pathwise Observation System, the authors found alignment with both the candidates' self-assessment and their ranking of the most important dispositions.

In a 2010 study, Nixon et al. surveyed principals on criterion for non-renewing probationary teachers. The results of the study revealed that principals most frequently recommended teachers for non-renewal based on ethical violations and inappropriate conduct. The dispositions included in these categories include the ability to demonstrate fairness, equity, justice, and other ideals as well as professional demeanor, work ethic, preparation, punctuality and sense

of humor. Principals also reported that the least frequent reason for recommending non-renewal included pedagogy, skill levels, and knowledge.

Dr. Arthur Combs focused his work on perceptual psychology and defined effective teaching as a “helping relationship” which is comprised of five perception areas: perceptions about subject matter, perceptions about self, perceptions about others, perceptions about the teaching task (or purpose and process of learning), and general frame of reference (Combs, 1966). Dr. Mark Wasicsko, under Dr. Comb’s guidance, developed a self-guided manual for evaluating educator dispositions. This tool (Wasicsko, 1977) is intended to be used by administrators during the hiring process as well as admission into teacher preparation programs in reliable and accurate manner and will be outlined in this review of literature.

While there is much overlap in the definitions of dispositions, experts generally agree on broad indicators of dispositions related to effective teaching. Subjectivity exists in the evaluation criteria as dispositions can be interpreted differently among raters. “Flexibility” and “enthusiasm” are often used as dispositions of effective teachers; however, identifying flexible and enthusiastic behavior in teachers can vary greatly by the evaluator.

## **2.3 Dispositions Evaluation Models**

The challenge teacher educators faced when accrediting organizations included dispositions into their standards was to define “dispositions” and to develop a method of assessing teacher candidate dispositions. Examining the literature on educator dispositions reveal the lack of consensus on which dispositions are most important to effective teaching and the difficulty in evaluating dispositions. At the pre-service level, teacher educators have a number of opportunities

to evaluate teacher candidates' dispositions. Admission interviews, self-assessments, written reflections, and observations are just a few of the evaluation methods used by teacher educators.

Wilkerson and Lang developed the Disposition Assessments Aligned with Teacher Standards model (Wilkerson & Lang, 2007). The authors identify four methods of evaluating dispositions, which include selected response, constructed response, observed performance, and projective techniques. Each method has unique strengths and weaknesses, and while these methods can also be used to measure content knowledge and pedagogical skills, it is important to remember that these measurements are a snapshot in time. The authors recognize that in order to accurately evaluate educators, it is important to use multiple measures over time.

Selected response methods of evaluation include predetermined responses, which is usually a scaled response but can also include multiple choice and true/false questions. While scales are the easiest to score, they can be difficult to write to evaluate specific dispositions (Wilkerson & Lang, 2007). The authors also note that selected response methods allow for the candidates to fake their responses or even make a guess when responding. Of the different types of scales (Likert, semantic differential, rating, and Thurstone), Wilkerson and Lang recommend the Thurstone scales, which force the candidate to either agree or disagree with statements, as they are the easiest to aggregate and interpret (2007).

When evaluating dispositions by using constructed response methods, Wilkerson and Lang (2007) suggest questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups. The authors conclude that these are easier to create but are challenging to evaluate due to their subjectivity, requiring training, examples, and rubrics for reliable results. The most authentic evaluation method of constructed responses is the interview and focus groups, as questionnaires allow for copying or cheating

(Wilkerson & Lang, 2007). Focus groups would include students of the teacher to determine how the children perceive their teacher.

Wilkerson and Lang (2007) also outline observation methods used to evaluate dispositions: classroom observations, behavioral checklists, and event reports. Event reports are generally used in identifying negative or inappropriate behaviors. The authors report that dispositions are difficult to evaluate through observations, as observations are more often used to evaluate a teachers' skills. Wilkerson and Lang also note that different levels of data can be obtained during a classroom observation, depending on the frequency of the observer. For example, the data obtained by a building principal or university supervisor during a classroom observation may be different than that of a cooperating teacher (2007).

The final method Wilkerson and Lang (2007) identify as a method for evaluating dispositions are projective techniques. Thematic apperception allows the examiner to interpret results of the examinee who is presented with a stimulus card. Also known as Situational Analysis Tests, thematic apperception tests are useful "to find patterns of responses that surface without directing prompting" (p. 31). Of the four methods outlined by the authors, this method is one that they least recommend as it takes a large amount of training by the evaluator to ensure reliability and teacher candidates may respond outlandishly (2007).

Using the four types of evaluation methods described above, Wilkerson and Lang (2007) outline a five step process by which teacher educators and administrators can use to develop their own systematic disposition evaluation using any set of teacher standards. The authors also provide instructions in how to use statistical analysis to ensure validity.

## **2.4 Disposition Evaluation of Pre-Service Teachers**

Charleston Southern University developed rubrics to evaluate teacher candidates' observable and measurable behavior supporting their vision for "competent, caring, committed teachers" (Karges-Bone & Griffin, 2009, p. 30). The curriculum in CSU teacher preparation program provides multiple opportunities for teacher candidates to use the established rubrics to analyze case studies. The teacher candidates themselves are regularly evaluated using the same rubrics and any student who demonstrates a pattern of undesirable behavior is subject for remediation. Violations to the dispositional rubrics can require the teacher candidate to write their own remediation plan, which is monitored by a faculty member. The CSU evaluation model also includes a "three strikes and you are out" model for dispositional violations.

Wilson and Cameron (1996) used student teacher journals to evaluate dispositions because the unstructured journals provided a range of perceptions. The written responses allowed the authors to examine the "contextual understanding and insight into the thinking which underpins many of the perceptions" the student teachers held.

Arkansas State University uses the Teacher Dispositions Form (Stewart & Davis, 2009) to evaluate preservice teachers. The checklist includes dispositions in eight categories in the following areas: responsibility, dependability, creativity, empathy, professionalism, and commitment to lifelong learning. The institution defines dispositions as "character and personality traits that are considered necessary for a person to succeed as a teacher." The College of Education and Professional Ethics and Jacksonville State University included the dispositions in an assessment instrument that includes attendance and punctuality, timeliness with assignments, appearance, poise, attitude, initiative, responsiveness to feedback, and rapport (Notar et al., 2009).

Researchers from the University of Tampa attempted to operationalize indicators of effective teacher dispositions (Johnston, Henriott, & Shapiro, 2011). The highest rated disposition indicators included professionalism, positive attitude, oral and written communication, diversity, preparedness, collaboration, self-directed, emotional intelligence, reflective, caring, respectful, and focused on student needs (p. 398). The process by which student teachers are evaluated include a dispositional assessment that is completed by faculty members prior to student teaching. Any preservice teacher who fails the disposition assessment is referred for departmental review for retention, remediation, or dismissal.

Predicting the effectiveness of teaching based on dispositions was the focus of the work of Masunaga and Lewis (2011). Using a disposition self-assessment survey, the authors compared student teaching rating and disposition self-assessments to demonstrate that teachers who had a lower rating for student teaching also scored lower on the disposition self-assessment. Additionally, an item analysis of the survey stated that pre-service teachers who have the ability to collaborate with others had higher student teaching ratings. Dispositions included in this study's self-assessment included collaboration, communication, positive attitude, enthusiasm, responsibility for all students, reflective of teaching, and comfort receiving feedback.

## **2.5 Evaluating Dispositions During the Interview**

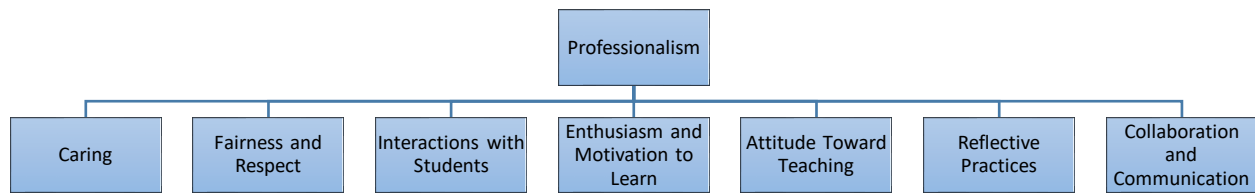
While teacher educators have the opportunity to evaluate teacher candidates over the course of several years using a variety of methods, the challenge for school administrators is that they have a very small window of time in which to evaluate teacher candidates' dispositions before hiring them. As noted above, dispositions can be evaluated through a variety of methods; however,

some of those methods are not suitable for the interview process. The remainder of this literature review will focus on evaluating educator dispositions during the most common form of evaluation during the hiring process: the interview.

Behavior-based interviewing (BBI) is a method that “focus on candidates’ past behaviors as the predictor of their future performance” (Clement, 2009, pp. 22–23). Using open-ended questions that elicit a story response can prompt teacher candidates to share their values and opinions (Bangerter, Corvalan, & Cavin, 2014). The same study discovered that applicants who produced more stories were given higher recommendations by recruiters (2014). Behavior-based interviews have been used for decades in other sectors, including the business world and the medical field, and can be transferred to education hiring practices. While specific studies have not incorporated behavior-based interviewing and disposition evaluation related to national teaching standards, the research that supports the use of BBI in other sectors can be considered when developing interview questions for teacher candidates.

Identifying affective characteristics of effective teachers is difficult (Stronge, 2018). Within the framework for effective teaching, Stronge (2018) identifies a number of characteristics effective teachers possess: caring, fairness and respect, interactions with students, enthusiasm, and motivation to learn, attitude toward teaching, reflective practice and collaboration, and communication. See Figure 1.





**Figure 1. Framework for Professionalism**

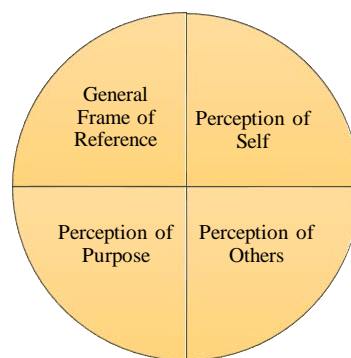
Building off of his earlier work, Stronge and Hindman developed a *Teacher Quality Index* (2006), which is a set of protocols designed for school leaders to use to improve their ability to identify effective educators during the interview process. The questions and evaluation criteria in the protocols are based on a synthesis of research regarding the selection interviews and qualities of effective teachers and the tool was validated through a number of studies.

The National Network for the Study of Educator Dispositions offers a Dispositions Rater Certificate upon successful completion of the Professional Perceptual Rater Exam, based on the self-instructional manual *Assessing Educator Dispositions: A Perceptual Psychology Approach* (Wasicsko, 2002). Kentucky Association of School Administrators, along with Dr. Randy Poe, provide a self-paced, online training module based on Dr. Wasicsko's rating tool. This online training course helps administrators identify dispositions of effective teachers during the interview.

With several decades of research on educator dispositions, Wasicsko's instructional manual uses five disposition areas: perceptions about subject matter, perceptions about self, perceptions about others, perceptions about the teaching task (or purpose and process of learning), and general frame of reference (See Figure 2); he correlates these dispositions to the NCATE 2000 Standards (2002). He uses a Likert scale to evaluate each disposition and suggests that

dispositional evaluation should occur through written narrative, interviews, and/or observations (p. 5).

Wasicsko's rating tool is based on Combs, Blume, Newman, and Wass's (1974) teacher effectiveness research. Using the Delphi method and over 25 research studies on teacher effectiveness, Combs refined previously researched dispositions from twelve categories to the following five: perception about the subject, perception of self, perception of others, perception of purpose of education and process of learning and general frame of reference.



**Figure 2. Educator Dispositions**

Perceptions of Self: Educators who “feel a oneness with all people, perceive themselves as deeply and meaningfully related to persons of every description” (p. 21) would be rated as “Identified” while educators who “feels generally apart from others, whose feelings of oneness are restricted to those of similar beliefs” (p. 21) would be rated as “Unidentified.” Example questions to examine this disposition include: “What kind of problems do people bring to you?” and “Describe your perfect day.”

Perceptions of Others: Wasicsko (2002) uses the Likert scale to evaluate teacher candidates' perceptions of others in two categories: able and unable. Applying the self-fulfilling

concept, interview questions may help administrators reveal biases that could negatively impact students. Examples of questions related to the perception of others include: “How would your colleagues describe you?” or “Tell us about a situation in which you helped a person or taught a significant lesson.”

**Perceptions of Purpose:** According to Wasicsko (2002), teachers who have a ‘larger’ perception of purpose are more effective teachers. He defines these teachers as ones who “view events in a broad perspective. His/her goals extend beyond the immediate to larger implications and contexts” (p. 31). Examples of questions related to the perception of purpose include: “Our mission statement is....From the perspective of your impact in your classroom and position, how do you help the District realize this vision?”

**Frame of Reference:** The purpose of evaluating a teacher candidates’ frame of reference is to determine between people and things. Wasicsko (2002) writes, “People-oriented teachers are concerned with individual students and . . . they realize that significant learning takes place through experiences that are personally meaningful” (p. 36). Examples of questions related to a teacher candidate’s frame of reference include “If your life works out the best you can imagine, what will you be doing in 5 years?” and “How do you maintain a balance between work and play?”

## **2.6 Cautions Regarding Dispositional Hiring**

The topic of educator dispositions is not without controversy. A source of conflict concerning disposition evaluation is the overlap between dispositions and ethics. A number of professional standards referenced codes of ethics, suggesting that they can be helpful to teacher educators when defining dispositions. Wilkerson and Lang (2007) argue that dispositions are not

the same as morals and ethics, citing that “ethics and morality. . . are all about knowing the difference between right and wrong and avoiding “wrong” actions that can be harmful to others” (p. 13). Additionally, the authors identify a number of reasons why morals and ethics should not frame dispositional evaluation: it is difficult to identify morals and ethics unless an egregious error is observed, and moral and character education can have religious overtones that may not be supported by all members of society.

Additionally, there is a belief that the use of dispositions in evaluating teachers, especially when it is used for admission into teacher education programs, can be a “gate-keeping” mechanism and discriminatory. According to the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (*Washington State University*, n.d.), “A new trend in campus censorship is emerging: this summer, Washington State University used “dispositions” theory to punish an education student for his political and religious expression.” In 2005, an education student from Le Moyne College was expelled for advocating for corporal punishment on the grounds that his disposition was incongruous with the program, however he reinstated by the New York District Court of Appeals (Jacobson, 2006). Dispositions assessments have been legally challenged at Washington State University, Brooklyn College, and the University of Alaska (Wilson, 2005).

It can be considered that the idea of educator dispositions could exist as a culturally embedded phenomenon. Given the geographical locations of some of the works cited in this review of literature, dispositions could be used as a way to perpetuate systems of inequality as evidenced by the court cases above.

Others argue that dispositions are necessary to incorporate into teacher evaluation from a social justice perspective. Villegas (2007) contends that teachers’ attitudes and beliefs about students are relevant to measure, especially beliefs about students of color and students with

disabilities. Citing recent studies about teachers' beliefs, Villegas reports that the deficit ideology is prevalent in educators who, in turn, lower their expectations for those students. She further points out that,

Given the negative views many prospective teachers have about students of color and their potential for learning, teacher educators must create space in preparation programs for candidates to inspect their beliefs about diverse students as an initial step in the process of learning to teach a diverse population. (p. 375)

Evaluating teachers on their beliefs about all students having the ability to learn and the ability to teach all students equitably can close the achievement gap observed by diverse learners.

With a strong focus on equity, the NYC Leadership Academy has identified five dispositions educators must possess in order to develop anti-bias and equitable schools:

Reflect on personal assumptions, beliefs and behaviors, publicly model a personal belief system that is student centered and grounded in equity, act with cultural competence and responsiveness in interactions, decision-making and practice, confront and alter institutional biases of student marginalization, deficit-based school, and low expectations associated with race, and create systems and structures to promote equity with a focus on race. (Gutiérrez, 2019)

Conducting anti-bias work in order to develop these dispositions can be emotional and difficult and must ultimately begin with self-reflection. Understanding individual misperceptions about race and changing ones understanding of what it means to be racist can contribute to effective anti-bias professional learning (DiAngelo, 2018).

Of the decisions administrators make, hiring teachers is an important one that has profound consequences. Understanding the characteristics of effective teachers and coming to know those

characteristics during the hiring process is an adaptive challenge presented to district leaders. Pedagogical skill and content knowledge are essential for teachers to understand and apply in the classroom, but they are not the only thing that effective teachers must possess. Having the right dispositions, or the heart for teaching, is essential as well. Coming to know the heart of a teacher by incorporating dispositional questions into the interview may allow administrators to evaluate the attitudes and beliefs of teacher candidates.

### **3.0 Methods**

This chapter describes the research methodology used to conduct this qualitative study of a rural Pennsylvania school district's use of dispositional hiring practices. In the 2017 hiring season, the district implemented the use of dispositional questions throughout the interview process. This inquiry was designed to serve as a formative evaluation of the newly implemented dispositional questions by collecting feedback by those who participate in the interview process.

#### **3.1 Problem Area**

Effective teachers possess more than just content and pedagogical knowledge and skills, but also the dispositions, or the values, attitudes, and beliefs, to develop relationships with their students (Poe, n.d.; Rutledge, Harris, & Ingle, 2010; Stronge & Hindman, 2006). The importance of educator dispositions has been recognized by national accreditation organizations and incorporated into professional teaching standards (Wilkerson & Lang, 2007). Teacher dispositions have been described differently in a number of studies and as a result, dispositions can be very difficult to evaluate (Masunaga & Lewis, 2011; Notar et al., 2009; Stewart & Davis, 2009; Wasicsko, Wirtz, & Resor, 2009; Wilkerson & Lang, 2007; Wilson & Cameron, 1996).

During the interview, building principals and other administrators have a small window in which to evaluate teacher dispositions. Content knowledge and pedagogical skills can be identified through grade point average, scores on certification exams, and through specific content and pedagogical questions. Evaluating dispositions is much more subjective and little guidance is

provided about measuring dispositions (Schulte et al., 2008). Training administrators in assessing dispositions through the interview process can help identify effective teacher candidates (Wasicsko, 1977, 2004).

Over the course of several semesters, teacher education faculty have multiple opportunities to evaluate and develop pre-service teachers' dispositions, compared to school administrators who have fewer opportunities. Faculty of teacher preparation programs around the country have developed a number of methods for evaluating dispositions including observations, interviews, checklists, written reflections (Wilkerson & Lang, 2007).

### **3.2 Inquiry Setting**

The district in this study is a rural school district in Pennsylvania, consisting of approximately 2,600 students, 225 professional staff, and 130 support service personnel. Four teacher preparation programs exist within a 20-mile radius of the district. The rural location of the district presents a challenge in attracting teacher candidates.

Recognizing that the district's interview process may not be identifying the best candidates, a team of four administrators, which included the assistant superintendent, the high school principal, an elementary principal, and assistant supervisor of special education, attended a training in Boone County, Kentucky on evaluating teacher candidates' dispositions during the interview process in early 2017. The Kentucky school district had been recognized at a national level for incorporating educator dispositions into their hiring practices and offered to include the district's team in their own administrator training. The team returned to train the administrative team so



that the district could incorporate dispositional questions into the hiring for the 2017-2018 hiring season.

Beginning in 2018, the district team that was initially trained in dispositional hiring in Kentucky has been asked by a number of local districts to share our hiring practices and experiences using this type of questioning. This inquiry will help the team better understand how the use of dispositional questioning has impacted the district and can refine the training they are providing to other local districts.

### **3.3 Strategic Plan and Profile of a Graduate**

The district uses a strategic plan, which is revised approximately every six to seven years. The current strategic plan began in 2016, expires in 2022, and is comprised of four goal areas: collaborative culture, continuous growth, health and safe school environment, and learning. Building principals are required to have three to five building level, multi-year goals directly tied to the goal areas of the strategic plan and are reviewed annually by the superintendent and assistant superintendent serving as the basis of the building principal's evaluation.

In addition to the strategic plan, the district recently revised the attributes of an optimal district graduate outlined in the strategic plan. Using student, staff and community involvement, the district improvement committee created a Profile of a Graduate, which outlines six attributes: global citizen/empathetic advocator, creator/innovator, collaborator, continuous learner, critical thinker/problem solver, and communicator. Curriculum revisions are focused around the Profile of a Graduate, which include grade level capstone tasks at the elementary level and performance

tasks at the secondary level. Currently, there is some consideration of revising interview questions to include attributes described in the Profile of a Graduate.

### **3.4 Stakeholders**

Students identify educator dispositions when describing their favorite (and least favorite) teachers. Most students describe their favorite teachers with character traits that can be tied back to the teacher's values, attitudes and beliefs, not content knowledge or pedagogical skills (Wasicsko, 2005). The students of the district are among the most important stakeholders of this inquiry. Of the 2,600 students, 94 percent are White, 32 percent are economically disadvantaged, and 18 percent receive special education services. Fifteen percent of high school students in this district are enrolled in our local Career and Technical school while 46 percent matriculate to a four-year college.

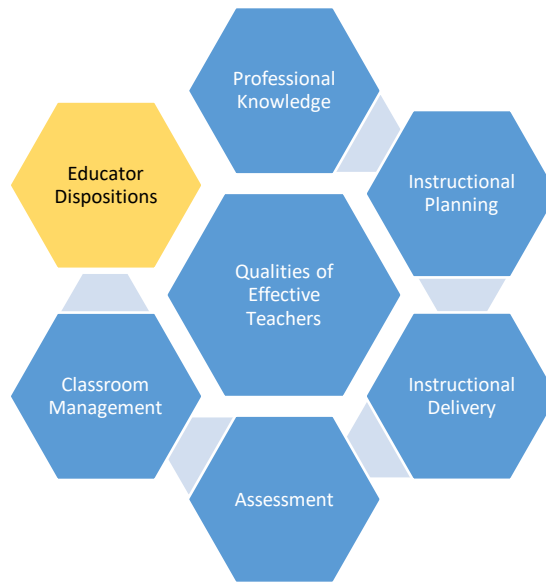
Of the 225 teachers in the district, the average number of years spent teaching in the district is just over eleven while 61% have earned a master's degree. Along with the students, the teachers have a significant impact on the culture of the building and those with the dispositions of effective teachers can positively contribute to that culture. The district includes teacher leaders on interview teams but has not provided dispositional training to those individuals.

The Administrative team is comprised of fifteen members, eight who are building principals and assistant principals and seven central office administrators. With the exception of assistant principals, all other administrators are involved in the interview process. When administrators select teachers who do not have the dispositions to teach, they must concentrate their time and effort on those ineffective teachers (Yariv, 2009).

Teacher candidates who apply to the district are generally individuals from the local teacher preparation programs or individuals who are looking to move to back to the area after the completion of their teacher preparation program. Teacher candidates are coached by their professors and supervising teachers on how to interview and which concepts to incorporate into their responses. Dispositional questions are more revealing of a candidate's values and beliefs. Statistics in this section are from the district's website and Pennsylvania School Performance Profile (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2018).

### **3.5 District Hiring Process**

Prior to the use of dispositional questions, the district's interview process was based on the work of Stronge and Hindman's (2006) Teacher Quality Index, which provides research based protocol for teacher selection. Interview prompts are based on six quality domains, which include prerequisites of effective teaching, personal characteristics, classroom management, planning for instruction, instructional delivery, and assessment (Stronge & Hindman, 2006). Following the initial round of training by the small administrative team in Kentucky in 2017, the district replaced the personal characteristic questions with dispositional questions (See Figure 3). In an attempt to identify hiring needs earlier, the district and collective bargaining unit agreed to move the teacher intent notification from April 1 to March 1 with the most recent bargaining agreement, which was finalized in the fall of 2018.



**Figure 3. District Adapted Version**

The district uses an online talent management software system as the vehicle to track application materials. Teaching positions are posted on the district's website and social media accounts. Additionally, the district participates in a regional teacher recruitment day at a local university. Advertisement and participation in this event generates four to five hires each year. The district has also advertised unique positions including specialists and administrative vacancies through Pennsylvania School Boards Association.

At the conclusion of the application period, applicants are screened and ranked by the assistant superintendent using a pre-established rubric. From that pool, top applicants are invited for a speed round of interviews with the selected interview panel, which consists of four to five interview questions, taking about twenty minutes per interview. If the number of applicants is small, the speed round will be eliminated.

Twenty-four hours prior to the screening round of interviews, applicants are emailed a dispositional question and are asked to prepare a written response to the prompt. The interview

team reviews the applicant's response prior to the interview and provides further discussion and questioning with the applicant, based on his or her response. The interview team uses four to five additional questions, all based around content and pedagogy, and ends the formal questioning with one final dispositional question.

After the round of screening interviews, the top-rated candidates are selected for a longer, second round of interviews. The same interview team uses a different and longer set of 15–20 questions, with about ten percent of the questions consisting of dispositional questions. During this interview, all four dispositional areas are targeted (i.e., perception of self, perception of others, perception of purpose, and general frame of reference).

After the second round of interviews, the interview team selects one candidate to move forward for a final interview with the district's superintendent. Upon his approval, the candidate will move forward for final approval by the board of directors.

### **3.6 Problem of Practice**

Identifying effective teachers during a short interview is a difficult task. The district uses an induction program, flexible professional development and instructional coaches and building administrators to help new teachers develop stronger content knowledge and pedagogical skills. Asking dispositional questions is the district's attempt at to understand teacher candidates' dispositions, as it is accepted that it can be difficult to change values, attitudes, or beliefs. Because hiring teachers is an important task, regular evaluation of this process is essential for organizational improvement.

### **3.7 Inquiry Questions**

The purpose of this study was to explore and understand the impact of dispositional interview questions have on teachers and administrators in the district. More broadly, the questions explored administrators and teachers' perceptions of the use of dispositional questions during the interview. The specific questions that this study explored are as follows:

1. How does the use of the current dispositional interview questions affect administrators hiring decisions?

The district evaluates dispositions of teacher candidates through a written response administered just before the in-person interview as well as a number of dispositional interview questions. This question explored administrators' attitudes and beliefs regarding the use of current dispositional interview questions.

2. How does the use of dispositional interview questions affect the new hire's perception of the district?

This question explored the perceptions interviewees have about the interview process, specifically how interviewees felt regarding the use of behavior-based interview questions and being questioned about their values, attitudes, and beliefs as a part the interview process.

3. What lessons have been learned as the district implemented the use of dispositional hiring practices?

Based on the work of Snowden and Boone (2007) and the Cynefin framework, hiring effective teachers is a complex problem. Solving complex problems require open discussions in order to understand instructive patterns (Snowden & Boone, 2007). In order to generate knowledge for decision-making, interviews were conducted with administrators and interviewees,

and through coding derived from literature, organizational needs related to dispositional hiring were determined.

### **3.8 Inquiry Design**

The inquiry design conducted a formative evaluation of the use of dispositional hiring practices in the district, which uses the dispositional rating tool by Wasicsko (2002), based on the perceptual psychology framework of Combs (1982). Using a constructivist framework, personal interviews of administrators who are responsible for hiring decisions, as well as personal interviews of the interviewees who were ultimately hired were conducted. Evaluation coding (Patton, 2002; Saldaña, 2015) was used and also included other affective coding including but not limited to values coding (Saldaña, 2015). In order to capture the essence of the culture of the district, drafts of the analysis were shared with the participants to increase validity.

**Table 1. Evidence and Method**

Inquiry Question	Evidence	Method	Analysis
How does the use of dispositional interview questions affect administrators hiring decisions?	<p>Evidence pertaining to administrators perceptions of dispositional interviewing were observed through their responses regarding their confidence in hiring decisions using Wasicsko's tool (2002). Indicators include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confidence in the tool and interview process (Stronge &amp; Hindman, 2006)</li> <li>• Quality of candidates hired using the tool (Stronge &amp; Hindman, 2006)</li> <li>• Perception of importance of dispositions (Wasicsko, 2002)</li> </ul>	<p>Personal, semi-structured face-to-face interviews of the eight administrators involved the hiring process in the district. Interview responses were coded to determine emerging themes and patterns, which were analyzed.</p>	<p>The theoretical approach to the interview analysis was inductive. In order to understand how administrators and teachers understand dispositional interviewing, responses to interview questions were transcribed, coded, and then analyzed to determine themes and patterns. Evaluation coding (Patton, 2002; Saldaña, 2015) was used.</p>
How does the use of dispositional interview questions affect the teacher applicant's perception of the district?	<p>Evidence relating to the perceptions newly hired teachers hold regarding their experience with dispositional interviews were observed through their responses regarding their ability to express their values attitudes and beliefs during the interview.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceived purpose of dispositional questions (Wasicsko, 2002)</li> <li>• Perceptions of interview process (Stronge &amp; Hindman, 2006)</li> <li>• Perceived ability to express values, attitudes and beliefs during interview process (Wasicsko, 2002)</li> </ul>	<p>Personal, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews of interviewees who were ultimately hired using dispositional questions (beginning with the 2017 hiring season) were conducted.</p>	



Table 1 (continued)

What lessons have been learned by the implementation of dispositional questions during the district's hiring process?	Solving complex problems require open discussions in order to understand instructive patterns (Snowden & Boone, 2007). Knowledge must be generated and analyzed in order to conduct a strategic needs assessment (Sleezer, Russ-Eft, & Gupta, 2014) to identify any needs that may exist within the hiring process.	In order to generate knowledge for decision making, personal, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted with administrators involved the hiring process in the district and interviewees who were ultimately hired using dispositional questions.
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### **3.9 Principal Investigator Positionality**

I am an administrator in this district with experience in hiring support staff, teachers, and administrators using dispositional questions. An advantage of conducting interviews is that I have a professional relationship with all of the administrators with whom I interviewed, so administrators may have been more willing to disclose information (Mertens, 2015). A disadvantage of this method is the fact that I am an administrator who interviewed newly hired teachers who may not have shared as openly due to the nature of the supervisory role I hold within the district (Mertens, 2015).

### **3.10 Recruitment**

Potential participants, including all administrators in the district who participate on hiring committees and newly hired teachers since 2017, were recruited using personal solicitation by the principal investigator, through electronic and in-person communication. Participants met the following criteria:

- Administrator in the district with hiring experience using dispositional questions; or
- Teachers hired in the district since 2017 who answered dispositional questions.

Participants received an informed consent letter and interviews were scheduled with the principal investigator upon the receipt of the informed consent document.

### **3.11 Protocols**

Interviews were conducted in a one-on-one, face-to-face manner and were semi-structured and conversational in nature. Interviews began with three demographic questions in order to gather informational data and build positive rapport with participants. Data from these questions were helpful in exploring correlations between administrative experience, preparation, and perceptions of dispositional questions. The interviewer gave participants a brief overview of educator dispositions, including the definition and purpose for including them in the interview protocol. The investigator shared examples of dispositional questions that the district has used to help remind administrators and interviewees the types of questions that were used. Interview questions were derived from the research questions and are outlined in Table 2.

**Table 2. Interview Protocols**

Research Question	Interview Questions
How does the use of dispositional interview questions influence administrators hiring decisions?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How long have you been an administrator?</li> <li>• How long have you been in your current position?</li> <li>• How many years have you participated on hiring committees?</li> <li>• Do you recall using dispositional hiring questions? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ If so, how has it impacted your hiring decisions?</li> <li>○ Why?</li> <li>○ What made you feel that way?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• What values, attitudes, and beliefs are you looking for when you're hiring? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How do you uncover that during the interview?</li> <li>○ Why is that important?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Given the four dispositions (perception of self, perception of others, perception of purpose and general frame of reference), what has been your experience using dispositional questions during the interview?</li> <li>• Do dispositions matter? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Are there some that are more important than others?</li> <li>○ What about the interview helps you know that?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Given dispositional, content, and pedagogical questions, how would you weight the importance of each?</li> <li>• Can you think of a time when dispositions came into play when making a hiring decision?</li> <li>• Are there dispositional questions that you find more beneficial than others? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How helpful are the dispositional questions asked during the interview in your hiring decisions?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Table 2 (continued)

<p>How does the use of dispositional interview questions affect the teacher applicant's perception of the district?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How long have you been a teacher?</li> <li>• How do you prepare for interviews? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How did your teacher preparation program prepare you for interviews?</li> <li>○ What was most helpful?</li> <li>○ Were there things that were suggested to you that you did not find to be true?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Approximately how many interviews have you participated in?</li> <li>• During your interview with the district, you were asked dispositional questions, which are intended to elicit one's values attitudes and beliefs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ These questions include a written response prior to the in-person interview and interview questions by the panel.</li> <li>○ Did these questions allow you to express your values attitudes and beliefs during the interview?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How did your interview with the district differ from others you've had? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How did the dispositional questions make you feel about the quality of your interview?</li> <li>○ How did the dispositional questions make you feel about the district?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>What lessons have been learned as the district implemented the use of dispositional hiring practices?</p>	<p>Administrators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe the difference in your hiring decisions before and after your use of dispositional interview questions.</li> <li>• What tools or resources would support the districts hiring decisions?</li> </ul> <p>Interviewees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did you believe that you were able to convey your best version of your teaching abilities and character during your interview? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How did you know this?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

### **3.12 Data Analysis**

Interview audio files were uploaded to a secure, cloud-based storage application and were transcribed for clarity. Transcriptions were uploaded to a qualitative data analysis software program Nvivo. The codebook was uploaded to the Nvivo program and was developed from the review of literature. The sources include concepts from The Teacher Quality Index (Stronge & Hindman, 2006) and Assessing Educator Dispositions (Wasiscko, 2002).

### **3.13 Codebook**

The code book was developed by using two main sources: Stronge and Hindman's Teacher Quality Index (2006) and Wasiscko's Assessing Educator Dispositions (2002). The district uses these two works as the basis for the interview protocols for all positions. Stronge and Hindman identify six domains of effective teachers that are intended to be identified through the interview process: prerequisites of effective teaching, personal characteristics, classroom management, planning for instruction, instructional delivery and assessment (2006). Wasiscko (2002) identifies dispositions as the values, attitudes and beliefs a teacher should possess in order to be effective. The four dispositions include perception of self, which is characterized by identifiable or unidentifiable; perception of others, which is evaluated as viewing others as able or unable; perception of purpose, which is characterized by self-identifying ones purpose as larger or smaller; and a general frame of reference, where teachers are evaluated on their prioritization of people or things. The district essentially replaced Stronge and Hindman's personal characteristic questions with Wasiscko's dispositional questions.

Wasicsko's questions evaluate the following dispositions:

**Perceptions of Self:** Educators who “feel a oneness with all people, perceive themselves as deeply and meaningfully related to persons of every description” (p. 21) would be rated as “Identified” while educators who “feels generally apart from others, whose feelings of oneness are restricted to those of similar beliefs” (p. 21) would be rated as “Unidentified.” Example questions to examine this disposition include: “What kind of problems do people bring to you?” and “Describe your perfect day.”

**Perceptions of Others:** Wasicsko (2002) uses the Likert scale to evaluate teacher candidates' perceptions of others in two categories: able and unable. Applying the self-fulfilling concept, interview questions may help administrators reveal biases that could negatively impact students. Examples of questions related to the perception of others include: “How would your colleagues describe you?” or “Tell us about a situation in which you helped a person or taught a significant lesson.”

**Perceptions of Purpose:** According to Wasicsko (2002), teachers who have a ‘larger’ perception of purpose are more effective teachers. He defines these teachers as ones who “view events in a broad perspective. His/her goals extend beyond the immediate to larger implications and contexts” (p. 31). Examples of questions related to the perception of purpose include: “Our mission statement is.... From the perspective of your impact in your classroom and position, how do you help the District realize this vision?”

**Frame of Reference:** The purpose of evaluating a teacher candidates' frame of reference is to determine between people and things. Wasicsko (2002) writes, “People-oriented teachers are concerned with individual students and ...they realize that significant learning takes place through experiences that are personally meaningful” (p. 36). Examples of questions related to a teacher

candidate's frame of reference include: "If your life works out the best you can imagine, what will you be doing in 5 years?" and "How do you maintain a balance between work and play?"

Strong and Hindman (2006) identify a number of research-based influences on interview outcomes. These factors include accountability, halo effect, interview training, note taking, personal interactions, question format, scoring method, and structure. The interviewers ability to recall information about an interview increases when they are held accountable for how interviews are conducted (Brtek & Motowidlo, 2002). Previous responses by a candidate may influence the interviewers assessment of questions that follow, but rating strategies help prevent the halo effect from impacting subsequent ratings (Kiker & Motowidlo, 1998). Interview training and note taking improves interviewers' abilities to select effective candidates (Stevens, 1998; Burnett, Fan, Motowidlo, & DeGroot, 1998; Macan & Dipboye, 1994; Middelndorf & Macan, 2002). When interviewees use tactics such as integration and other soft tactics, they are able to make a positive connection with interviewers (Ellis, West, Ryan & DeShon, 2002; McFarland, Ryan, & Kriska, 2002). Finally, question format, scoring method and structure of interviews all impact interview outcomes (Stronge & Hindman, 2006).



**Table 3. Codebook**

Codes	Source(s)
TQI Quality Domains	(Stronge & Hindman, 2006)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Prerequisites of Effective Teaching</li><li>• Personal Characteristics</li><li>• Classroom Management</li><li>• Planning for Instruction</li><li>• Instructional Delivery</li><li>• Assessment</li></ul>	
Dispositions	(Combs, 1966; Wasicsko, 1977)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Perception of Self<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Identified vs. Unidentified</li></ul></li><li>• Perception of Others<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Able vs. Unable</li></ul></li><li>• Perception of Purpose<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Larger vs. Smaller</li></ul></li><li>• General Frame of Reference<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ People vs. Things</li></ul></li></ul>	
Influences on Interview Outcomes (p. 24)	(Stronge & Hindman, 2006)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Accountability</li><li>• Halo Effect</li><li>• Interviewer Training</li><li>• Note Taking</li><li>• Question Format</li><li>• Scoring Method</li><li>• Structure</li></ul>	

### **3.14 Codebook Verification and Procedures**

The proposed codebook was reviewed by the overview committee and was considered by central office administrators from other districts that are in a doctoral study group. Further, the codebook was shared with the assistant superintendent of the district, who is responsible for the hiring process.

Initial rounds of coding were inductive in nature in order to understand themes and patterns that emerge from the data gathered through the interviews. Secondary rounds of coding explored emerging themes generated from initial rounds of coding, and were deductive in nature, exploring any hypotheses that were derived from initial rounds of coding.

### **3.15 Proposed Deliverable Product**

The intention of this inquiry was to produce a report for the district that represents the findings, provides recommendations to improve hiring practices and identify topics of further inquiry, which were presented to the Superintendent. Regarding the administrative interview portion of the report, I anticipate the findings will be able to guide our administrative team's professional development in evaluating educator dispositions and possible suggestions in how to incorporate educator dispositions when making internal transfers or even teacher professional development. It may also help to refine our interview protocol based on the findings of this inquiry.

Regarding the teacher interview portion, I intend to compare the findings with our district's Strategic Plan to identify similarities that may closely align with the Profile of a Graduate

contained in our Strategic Plan. Additionally, the teacher interviews may provide themes that can be incorporated into our induction program as our new teachers acclimate themselves to the district. Finally, should administrators and teachers find dispositional interviewing impactful, the district may consider adjusting its recruiting strategy to target teacher preparation programs who intentionally develop dispositions, such as the University of Northern Kentucky, where Dr. Wasicsko is the chair of the education department.

Secondary to the district report, I intend to incorporate the findings into our district's dispositional interview training that we provide to other districts. Many of the questions we receive during our presentations are closely aligned with the inquiry questions in this study and may provide some validity to our presentation.

This study received Institutional Review Board approval through the University of Pittsburgh on February 14, 2019. The study identification number is 19010193. Audio recordings and transcriptions from this study will be destroyed six months from date of completion.

## **4.0 Findings**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to serve as a formative evaluation of the district's dispositional hiring practices by interviewing administrators and teachers about their experiences and perceptions of the hiring process. A total of 16 interviews were conducted, of which participation was completely voluntary. The interview protocol aligned with the research questions. Administrators who were invited to participate have hiring responsibilities, and teachers who were invited to participate answered dispositional questions during their interview with the district.

This chapter describes the results of the findings of this study. The research questions are:

Q1. How does the use of dispositional interview questions influence administrators' hiring decisions?

Q2. How does the use of dispositional hiring questions affect the teacher perception of the district?

Q3. What lessons have been learned as the district implemented dispositional hiring practices?

Interview data were gathered during the month of March 2019. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed using the application Rev Voice Recorder. Appendix A lists the interview protocol. Each interview began by requesting permission to record the conversation. Data were coded and transcribed from each interview at the conclusion of each conversation.

To organize the coding and emerging themes, transcriptions were uploaded into Nvivo and auto-coded to organize the transcripts by question. A deductive approach was used to categorize responses aligning with the content of codes derived from the Teacher Quality Index (Stronge & Hindman, 2006). Inductive coding was used to identify themes, develop more meaning from the responses, and uncover additional elements not originally included in the codebook.

#### **4.1 Administrator Data**

A total of sixteen interviews were conducted, which included six administrators and ten teachers (See Table 4.1). Demographic data collected during the interview was limited in order to maintain anonymity. Three elementary administrators, two secondary administrators, and one district level administrator participated in the study. The administrators who participated ranged from one to twenty years of administrative experience, with an average of eleven years of experience. The average time spent in the current administrative position is 6.9 years. Of the administrators who participated in the study, the average years participated on hiring committees is 14 years, which indicates that the administrators interviewed participated on hiring committees before they became administrators.

**Table 4. Administrators**

Number of Participants	6
Average Years of Administrative Experience	11
Average Years in Current Position	9.9
Years on Hiring Committees	14

#### **4.1.1 Administrators' perception of how dispositional questions have impacted their hiring decisions**

Of the administrators interviewed, all recalled using dispositional questions during the interview process. When asked about the impact dispositional questions have had on their hiring decisions, administrators shared that the questions had positively impacted their decisions. "I feel like I get a better understanding of someone's drive to be in education," shared one administrator. Another administrator preferred using the dispositional questions because they "give you a good perspective of willingness to be molded, big picture thinking, ideas of teamwork, sacrifice, doing what's right, and a lot of that you can't draw out in an instructional question."

Several administrators shared that dispositional questions are impactful because, unlike other interview questions that target pedagogy and content which can be developed in a teacher, dispositions are much more difficult to develop once a teacher has been hired.

Other administrators shared that dispositional questions allowed them to understand if a teacher will be a good fit for their building or district. "Often in interviews I'm trying to get a

sense of the person so these dispositional questions help me get a better understanding, I think, of who a person is,” shared one administrator.

The inability to rehearse anticipated responses is also appealing to administrators. “The dispositional questions require the candidate to think and give an open answer that can't be rehearsed. They're often a lot more honest, and so it gives you a better feel for their character,” shared one administrator.

#### **4.1.2 Values attitudes and beliefs: Administrative “look-fors”**

When asked about specific values, attitudes, and beliefs administrators look for in a candidate, the responses included a student-first attitude, the ability to collaborate, and who prioritize relationships with students.

Administrators were mixed when asked about how they uncover their desired values, attitudes, and beliefs during an interview. Many administrators used the dispositional questions as an example, while a few administrators shared their how they identified values in other types of questions; “I think it comes out in the questions when you ask them questions about instruction. They talk about the students and how they're going to make it meaningful for the students or they talk about building relationships before they can do instruction,” shared one administrator.

Four of the six administrators interviewed for this study shared their preference for dispositional questions compared to pedagogical and content related questions because they can shape the latter two through professional development. One administrator indicated this, saying “When you believe every child can achieve, I can teach you how to teach math. I can cover pedagogy pieces. I can't make people love every child. I can't make people see the value in every child.”

Other administrators shared that dispositional questions allow administrators to understand candidates' motivation and ability to contribute to the school community; one administrator supported this idea, saying, "I'm looking for a person who is curious and passionate and motivated to get better. Someone that maybe doesn't come with all the answers but wants to learn alongside the kids. Someone that...adds value to us in that they may have a unique perspective or life experience or outlook."

#### **4.1.3 Which dispositions are important?**

Of the six administrators who participated in this study, only two of the administrators listed dispositions specific to the Wasicsko model when asked about which dispositions are important in a teacher. One of the administrators was a member of the district team to be trained as a trainer on dispositional hiring while the other administrator had recently conducted interviews due to a mid-year resignation and was able to recall the specific dispositions in the Wasicsko model. The four other administrators admitted that they had favorite questions but could not name the specific disposition targeted in the question and shared that all four dispositions were equally important. All six administrators agreed that dispositions matter and are important to incorporate into the interview process.

Two administrators shared that when candidates are unable to answer dispositional questions, it can be a "red flag" for them; one administrator supported this idea, saying, "I have not been able to let any of the dispositional hiring questions slide. So we ask a question about content or about planning, and their vision of long term planning is not where I need it to be, I could probably let that be something I could work on," shared one elementary administrator. Other administrators supported this idea, especially when it came to interviewing candidates with little



to no professional experiences, as those candidates generally have a more limited understanding of content and pedagogy.

When asked about the importance between pedagogical, content, and dispositional questions, all six administrators interviewed shared that the dispositional questions were the most important to them when making hiring decisions. They generally support the idea that content and pedagogy can be taught and shaped throughout a teacher's career, but that dispositions are much more difficult to shape. "You can't teach them how to think for themselves and how to interact with a diverse culture...that's what we want, somebody who's going to be able to recognize and build on what we've already established," shared one administrator.

All administrators agree that dispositional questions are very helpful in making their hiring decisions, especially when it comes to questions about perception of others, including students. Administrators emphasized that they were looking for answers that included a growth mindset and the belief that all children had the ability to learn. "I want someone who has an unconditional, positive regard for children and the rest can fit in there. When you believe every child can achieve, I can teach you how to teach math," shared one administrator.

#### **4.1.4 Before and after dispositional questions**

Administrators were asked to compare their experiences on hiring committees before and after using dispositional questions. Four of the administrators responded that the dispositional questions made them more confident in their hiring decisions and two administrators also shared that they felt the questions created more consistency within the committee. "I think they confirm those (decisions) and it's across the board with whoever is on that interview committee. It gives a

consistent picture to look at versus you just digging for your own personal dispositions you're trying to get to," shared one administrator.

The use of rubrics to evaluate the dispositional questions were valuable to administrators; several of them mentioned that prior to the implementation of these questions, they had to evaluate the disposition through responses to other questions, and often relied on their instincts to make hiring decisions. One administrator summarized the transition to the dispositional questions, saying, "I learned a lot about people when I asked these dispositional questions versus before, [when] I was operating about people on a gut instinct."

## **4.2 Teacher Data**

Of the twenty-one teachers hired since the use of dispositional hiring questions, ten teachers participated in the study. Six elementary teachers and four secondary teachers participated in the study. The average years of experience for the teachers interviewed was 3.6 years and the average number of interviews the teachers participated in was between eight and nine interviews per person. The range of the number of interviews each candidate participated in was as low as two and as high as twenty-nine interviews while the range of experience was less than one year to twenty years of experience.

#### **4.2.1 How does the use of dispositional interview questions affect the teacher applicant's ability to express his/her values, attitudes, and beliefs during the interview process?**

Teacher interviews occurred during March 2019. Of the twenty-one teachers hired since the implementation of the dispositional questions, eleven agreed to participate in the study. Gender-neutral pronouns will be used in this section in order to maintain anonymity.

The teachers in this study prepared for interviews in a number of ways, which included reviewing teacher generated items (e.g., portfolios and résumés), looking up district websites (to gather information about the district, but also to see if the applicant is personally interested in the district), reflecting on experiences so that they could incorporate them into responses, and mock interviews. One teacher shared that the feedback from the individuals conducting the mock interviews were the most helpful while another teacher shared that the most helpful practice was talking to peers who had recently participated in interviews; this teacher shared that “hearing from the other people that had recently gone through interviews was probably the most helpful, hearing the questions that had recently come up, or even they had a principal come in one time and even ask practice questions.”

#### **4.2.2 Teacher's perceptions of their ability to express values attitudes and beliefs**

Teachers were also asked about their perception of their ability to express their values, attitudes, and beliefs during the interview with the district. When describing their experience with the district's interview, one teacher shared, “it kind of put the spotlight on who I was as a person. I felt like they valued that, knowing, okay, she has these qualities or these experiences. We can help grow her and mold her to become the teacher that we want here. I almost felt like they took

a chance on me as a person first, before they looked at, can she run a classroom the exact way we want her to. So I felt like it was more personable.”

Acceptance was a common theme throughout the responses when asked about their ability to express their values, attitudes, and beliefs during the interview with the district, “you were also looking at who I was, and that you were willing to accept me for who I was, and then help me build to become a better teacher,” shared one teacher. The teachers who participated in this study also shared that the dispositional questions made them feel more at ease, for example as conveyed by one teacher who shared “I felt much more comfortable, and I felt that I could be open about who I was and it wasn't all text book questions.”

This sentiment was echoed by other teachers, sharing that the interview with the district stood out, when compared to others, because the questions felt more like a conversation which helped them feel less nervous and more comfortable. One teacher shared, “I was asked a question that was more personal about myself as a person and an individual, not as a teacher. And then eventually I was like, okay you're not as scary as I thought you were.”

Other teachers shared that the dispositional questions implied that the district cared more about them as an individual as opposed to just knowing the definitions of current educational buzzwords, “other districts I went to, one of them would only ask me more like definitional-type questions to see if I knew what things meant, like the IEP process.”

When asked to compare the interviews(s) with the district to others they have participated in, all teachers agreed that their experience with the district was more comfortable. Other notable differences included the use of demo lessons, smaller interview panels, the types of questions, and group interviews.

Two teachers who participated in this study had interviewed and were offered positions at their alma maters, but chose to work in the district, based in part of their impression of the district during the interview process. When talking about the interview questions, one candidate shared that the dispositional questions made the administrators and teachers on the interview panel seem more personable, saying, “their personalities came so much into the interview after they started asking questions, and I didn't get that from different districts. It was really weird for me to walk into my alma mater and to be interviewed by teachers that I had or coaches that I had who are now in higher-up positions from since I graduated and act like they didn't know me.”

#### **4.2.3 Teacher impressions**

Teachers were asked about their impression of the quality of the interview with the district, and all reported that they felt their interview was of good quality. This perception may be skewed because, as successful candidates who all accepted offers from the district, they might naturally have a positive perception of their interview. One teacher summarized their perceptions in this way: “I feel like the dispositional questions let the interviewers see a glimpse of the future, how you would react in those situations, rather than just knowing how smart you are or how much information or definitions you were able to memorize from college.”

Other teachers felt confident about their interview because the questions allowed them to express their values, attitudes, and beliefs. “I think it's nice to know kind of what I believe in my values because especially working with children, it's nice to know how you feel about working with children,” shared one teacher.

The absence of a demo lesson made one teacher nervous when they were observed by the administrators on the interview panel. This teacher stated, “I was not as confident in myself

afterwards. Or I put more pressure on myself once they came in for observations, because I was more like, you never have seen me teach. Like I really have to show you that you did hire me for the foundation of what my position really is, not just because I'm fun to hang out with in an interview.” This teacher also was concerned that they were too relaxed during the interview because of the dispositional questions were more conversational than other questions, but that overall their experience was a positive one.

Another teacher recognized that they felt positively about the quality of their interview, but was left wondering, now that they have had the opportunity to get to know the individuals on their interview panel, if their feelings about the interview were about the questions, their responses to the questions, or the individuals themselves. This teacher summarized their perception: “I'm trying to make sure it's not just because of the people that were there. I would say it's because the questions were really about me as a person, like I felt like they were more wanting to know about me. I really did say...they say about a family here, and I felt like...I already felt that a little bit, but I think the interview confirmed that for me, just because the questions seemed genuine. They just seemed a bit more genuine.”

One teacher said that their impressions of their interview impacted their perspective on the district. She illustrated this point by saying, “I felt there was really no wrong answer. It was, ‘this is who I am,’ and it gave me a much better perspective of what I was walking into as well, because I felt that you cared about me as a person. There wasn't as big of a push on the, what does she remember from her college classes, as much as who I truly was.”

#### **4.2.4 Impressions of the district**

Teachers were also asked about their impression of the district, based on their interview. A common theme teachers often shared was the feeling of a family. “It just felt much more family-like of wanting to know that who they're hiring is going to actually care for the kids, but not only the kids in their classroom, but all the kids you're going to interact with at school, because this is one big family district,” shared one teacher. Another teacher echoed the family theme and how it impacted their decision to accept a position in the district, saying “I picked this because of that interview process. And I was excited to be here knowing that I was coming into something that was so family oriented.”

Other teachers spoke positively about the district’s interview process and related it to the whole child. One teacher summarized their perspective: “Others (districts) felt more like, what is she going to be able to get the kids to produce in an academic standpoint versus how is she going to be able to build relationships and treat them. Some of the questions in this district were more of the connections I was going to make with the kids, where in other districts it was just, well what is she going to be able to get them to produce at the end of the school year as such?”

#### **4.2.5 Ability to convey the best version of themselves**

Finally, teachers were asked about their ability to convey the best version of themselves during the interview with the district. All of the teachers felt positively about their ability to express their values, attitudes, and beliefs, but half of the teachers felt the dispositional questions overshadowed their ability to express their teaching abilities. “I was probably stronger in being

able to express myself and my characteristics more than what it would have been as an educator,” shared one teacher.

Another teacher shared that she was very confident in her ability to express who she was as a person, but was less confident in her ability to express her teaching abilities during the interview with the district. “I would like them to see how I teach. It's definitely important to know your stuff, but I think that will come out when you're actually teaching the lesson and teaching the kids.”

One teacher felt that the interview with the district allowed her to express her strengths more clearly. “In this interview, I felt like it was just more about how I was interacting with other people, which is more for me, I think, one of my strong suits, as opposed to all of those crossing your T's and dotting your I's kinds of things.”



## **5.0 Interpretation of Findings, Lessons Learned, and Conclusions**

The purpose of this study was to conduct a formative evaluation of the district's dispositional hiring practices. This chapter will connect the data discussed in the previous chapter to the themes identified through data analysis, provide recommendations for practice, discuss areas of future inquiry, and conclude with a brief summary.

This chapter includes a discussion, implications of practice, and future inquiry areas for the following inquiry questions:

Q1: How does the use of dispositional interview questions affect administrators' hiring decisions?

Q2: How does the use of dispositional interview questions affect the teacher applicants' perception of the district?

Q3: What lessons have been learned as the district implemented the use of dispositional hiring practices?

### **5.1 Interpretation of Findings**

The following section will describe the themes that emerged through data analysis of both administrator and teacher interviews. This section will focus primarily on addressing the first two research questions. Question 3 will be addressed in Section 5.3 of this chapter.

### **5.1.1 Administrator interview analysis**

Three elementary administrators, two secondary administrators, and one district level administrator participated in the study. Several major themes emerged from the analysis of the administrator interviews. Administrators indicated that dispositional questions are important to include in the interview protocol used by the district. Secondly, administrators report that dispositional questions make them more confident in their hiring decisions and assist with consistency across the members of the interview panel. Finally, the administrators requested additional training on dispositional questioning, which may improve their confidence in their hiring decisions.

Administrators spoke positively about the use of dispositional questions, and as a result, indicated that they are more confident in their hiring decisions. Prior to the use of dispositional questions, administrators relied more on their intuition to evaluate candidates' dispositions. Dispositional questions are behavior-based questions, which focus on candidates' past behaviors, to provide the administrator with "a clearer sense of the candidate's suitability for the position, based on the premise that past behavior is the best predictor of future performance" (Clement, 2009, p. 22–23). Administrators in this study shared that the responses to the dispositional questions allowed them to evaluate candidates' growth mindset, belief that all children can learn, motivation, and ability to contribute positively to the school community.

When asked about tools or resources that would contribute to their hiring decisions, administrators did not indicate any critique of the dispositional questions. While four out of the six administrators shared that the dispositional questions created more consistency across the committee's selection, none of the administrators recognized a need to evaluate the interview questions and candidates' responses. Typically, after all interviews have been conducted, the

administrators discuss which candidate to recommend for employment. A question analysis following the completion of the interviews may provide administrators with an opportunity to determine if the interview questions are aligned with the goals outlined in the strategic plan or characteristics of the district's profile of a graduate.

Additional training on the use of dispositional questioning may help improve administrators' ability to make hiring decisions (Stevens, 1998). Administrators in this study specifically requested additional trainings, most often as a refresher training that would occur prior to the interview season. Additional training on the four dispositions and practice evaluating candidates' responses might provide administrators with the opportunity to solidify their understanding of the dispositions, and more accurately evaluate responses to the questions using the established rubrics. For example, one administrator had a belief that "perception of purpose" was the most important disposition to evaluate during the interview, but as they described the reasons why they felt this way, they described the characteristics of two other dispositions. Administrator training is also supported by (Hindman, 2004), who reported that of the administrators who participated in a national study, nearly three-quarters of administrators did not receive training on how to interview teachers.

### **5.1.2 Teacher interview analysis**

Of the twenty-one teachers hired since the use of dispositional hiring questions, ten teachers participated in the study, including six elementary teachers and four secondary teachers. Similar to the administrators in this study, teachers spoke positively about their experiences with the district's interview process. Interviews allow the applicant to get to know the school system, a purpose that is often overlooked (Stronge & Hindman, 2006). Teachers in this study shared that

they used the district website to prepare for the interview and to evaluate the district's values. Another theme that surfaced from the teachers was that the questions made them feel as if they were having a conversation with the administrators, not participating in an interview. This allowed the teachers to feel more comfortable and less nervous, which ultimately contributed to their perception that they were able to convey the "best version" of themselves during the interview. Interviews that are less structured are typically better at gathering information about the interviewee as a person (Huffcutt, Conway, Stone, & Roth, 2001).

More than one year after they had participated in the interview, five of the ten teachers remembered the exact dispositional questions and how they answered them. The dispositional interviews include experiential and situational questions (Huffcutt et al., 2001). Experiential questions include discussion of past performance in a specific case while situational questions focus on how a candidate would handle a hypothetical situation (Stronge & Hindman, 2006). The teachers interviewed in this study remembered their responses to both experiential and situational questions, which may demonstrate the impactful nature of the responses.

Two teachers and one administrator shared that demonstration lessons would be helpful. Demonstration lessons would add considerable time to the interview process, but would offer the administrators a way to evaluate a candidate in a manner that is more closely aligned with how they evaluate current teachers, albeit on a much more frequent basis. The teachers who felt demonstration lessons would be helpful in conveying their teaching abilities perceived the dispositional questions as overshadowing their pedagogy and content knowledge during their interview.

## **5.2 Limitations**

Administrators spoke positively about the use of dispositional questions, which in the absence of negative comments, should be interpreted with caution. The number of participants was small, and because the district recently implemented the new questions, administrators have not had extensive experiences with these types of questions. The study also occurred just before the district began the current hiring process, so many of the administrators had not asked dispositional questions in almost a year. Additionally, while a few administrators hinted at topics of individual bias and diversity, conducting interviews with a social justice lens was not a theme administrators regularly incorporated into the conversations with the principal investigator.

As an administrator in the district, teachers may not have been willing to participate in this study or be as open or honest during the interview with the principal investigator. It should be noted that there were teachers who participated in this study who were hired by the district when the principal investigator served on the interview panel.

## **5.3 Lessons Learned**

The following section will address the third inquiry question of this study: “What lessons have been learned as the district implemented the use of dispositional hiring practices?” Both administrators and teachers interviewed for this study spoke positively about the dispositional hiring practices. This section will address a number of areas that may improve the interview outcomes as the district continues its dispositional hiring practices.

### **5.3.1 Administrator training for use of dispositional questions**

According to U.S. public policy, a fundamental element of an equal employment opportunity includes that “candidates must be evaluated in terms of characteristics that make a difference between success and failure on the job” (Stronge & Hindman, 2006). As such, it is important for administrator training to include a legal aspect of discrimination when it comes to teacher selection.

Additional administrator training may include recognizing individual biases (Campion, Palmer, & Campion, 1997). Administrators may benefit from understanding that their rating of a particular question may be impacted by the candidates’ previous response, which is also known as the halo effect (Kiker & Motowidlo, 1998) and that interviewees may attempt to make positive connections by using soft tactics such as ingratiation (Ellis et al., 2002); both of these may impact administrators’ abilities to fairly evaluate candidates during the interview.

Hiring educators based on dispositions is not without controversy. Tools such as the Multicultural Disposition Index (Thompson, 2009) and (Garmon, 2005) factors for changing attitudes and beliefs about diversity are resources the district can use to support administrator training of evaluating dispositions in a more equitable manner. Thompson (2009) supports the idea of educator dispositions: “Shying away from dispositions simply because it invites controversy is somewhat akin to civil rights activists of yesteryear standing down because their actions meant that they would spend time in jail” (p. 99).

The district also includes non-administrative stakeholders on interview panels. Typically, these individuals have a very limited experience asking and evaluating dispositional questions. Training materials and handouts could be developed to support their understanding of the four

dispositions in the Wasicsko model and how to evaluate those dispositions using the established rubrics.

### **5.3.2 Implement annual review of interview protocol**

Regular reviews of the interview protocol will improve interview outcomes (Stronge & Hindman, 2006). By providing the administrators the opportunity to review the protocols prior to the interview, administrators would have the opportunity to revise and/or add questions, based on the particular vacancy. Additionally, the opportunity to review the interview protocols following the interview season may allow administrators to determine if the questions align with the characteristics identified in the district's strategic plan and profile of a graduate.

### **5.3.3 Revise dispositional training**

A team of administrators who were originally trained in using dispositional hiring questions shared the district's journey as these questions were incorporated into the hiring process. Revising the presentation to include the findings of this study may support the informal opinions shared by the team as they train other districts to use dispositional questions. The training may be more relatable and realistic when the findings of this study are woven into the team's presentation.

### **5.3.4 Continue to engage newly hired teachers in conversations**

Finally, it may be beneficial to continue to engage in conversations with teachers about the interview process. Although the district may not formally evaluate the dispositional hiring

practices each year, it can be helpful to informally evaluate the perceptions of the teachers who participate in the interview process, which has been linked to a factor that influences the satisfaction of teachers and their retention (Liu & Johnson, 2006). The teacher data from Chapter Four could be reviewed with the administrative team during the previously suggested annual review of interview protocol.

### **5.3.5 Considerations for educational leadership programs**

Hiring teachers is a challenging and important decision school leaders make. It can be helpful for district leaders to understand the qualities that contribute to teacher effectiveness. As such, administrative certification programs might consider incorporating additional opportunities for future administrators to build the skills to evaluate teacher dispositions during the interview process, as the topics of dispositions are included in national accreditation organizations.

### **5.3.6 Recommendations for further inquiry**

Further inquiries could explore whether administrators' evaluations of a candidates' disposition change once they have a chance to get to know the teacher. A possible method to be used in such an evaluation would be that of (Young & Delli, 2002) who found that there is an association between the pre-employment dispositional evaluation and post-employment dispositional evaluation, which specifically used the Teacher Perceiver Interview Protocol. Additionally, knowing that teacher preparation programs are required to evaluate dispositions of pre-service teachers as a result of revised accreditation standards and have a number of opportunities and methods to do so, additional inquiries could include examining the consistency



between dispositional evaluations by teacher preparation programs compared to dispositional evaluations by administrators during employment interviews.

## **5.4 Summary**

The purpose of this study was to conduct a formative evaluation of the district's dispositional hiring practices. This chapter discussed the themes that emerged from the data, presented lessons learned from this study and areas of future inquiry. The district has had a positive experience using the dispositional questions during the interview process as reported by administrators who ask the questions and teachers who answer the dispositional questions. Further training would be beneficial for administrators on evaluating teacher candidates' dispositions, as well as regular opportunities to evaluate the interview protocol to ensure alignment with the district's strategic plan and profile of a graduate.

## **6.0 Reflection**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a personal reflection of my experiences during this study, as well as my doctoral journey. I summarize the skills and perspectives I have developed throughout this journey and provide examples of how I have applied them in my place of practice. Finally, I conclude this chapter with a personal commitment to positively impact our education system.

### **6.1 Personal Reflection of this Study**

This study has challenged me both professionally and personally. As the study comes to a close, I feel an immense sense of gratitude toward the district and my colleagues who have supported me through this journey. While I feel a sense of sadness that my doctoral journey may be ending, I'm inspired that I will continue to apply what I have learned to make meaningful change in my place of practice.

I recognized I was forever changed as a practitioner when, often throughout the months I was conducting my study, I would think to myself, '*I should really collect this data and code it*' or '*let's map out some improvement cycles after we have identified some primary and secondary drivers.*' I have been able to generalize the problem solving skills I refined for this study and apply them to not just solving larger problems of practice but even much smaller projects and tasks. I was able to apply these skills in order to help me understand if our district has enough professional staff members in a specific department, I mapped out primary and secondary drivers, planned

several Plan-Do-Study-Act cycles, and made small changes that improved the system and outcomes before hiring an additional staff member.

The largest growth area for me was my ability to listen and ask questions. Conducting interviews with carefully developed questions that aligned to the larger research questions in this study made me keenly aware of the importance of listening to responses and asking probing questions to refine my understanding. I am much more careful to listen first, ask for clarification, and seek out information from multiple perspectives. I am more aware of how easy it is for educational leaders to make assumptions and act on those assumptions without listening. Our work as educational leaders often pressures us into moving quickly because the stakes are high, but I have learned the importance of slowing down and listening first.

Closely aligned with listening is the ability to ask the right questions. Asking ‘*Why is this happening?*’, ‘*How will we know this is working (or not working)?*’ and ‘*Are we collecting the right information?*’ are just a few questions I find myself regularly incorporating into conversations. Through this program and this study, I have come to understand that asking multiple questions warrants a number of improvement cycles and ultimately helps me develop my leadership abilities. Specifically, this practice was applicable when I was working with teachers to select a new reading program. I was able to ask questions to uncover the need for a more accurate method of measuring individual student progress. By leading with questions, we can transform our educational practices.

This study was a formative evaluation that used inductive coding to understand themes and patterns that emerged from the data gathered. This process of evaluation and making meaning from the data is a practice that I believe educational leaders should do regularly. While evaluation may not be as formal or rigorous as a study that meets the criteria set forth by a doctoral program,

the evaluation process encourages growth and improvement, and is a practice I believe educational leaders should conduct regularly.

## **6.2 Personal Reflection of the Doctoral Experience**

The doctoral experience at the University of Pittsburgh has had a profound impact on my professional and personal development. The interdisciplinary approach, coupled with the cohort model, is a combination that has solidified my identity as a practitioner who is committed to solving the enduring problems of practice. The crucible that is the doctoral journey can be lonely and arduous at times, but the relationships with the faculty and fellow practitioners guided me through the trials. While some individuals pursue a doctorate to move onto other things, my experience at the University of Pittsburgh has allowed me to realize I have the heart of a practitioner, one who is committed to solve the problems we face as educators, and I now possess the skills to solve them.

As a practitioner, I have developed and refined a number of tools that will contribute to my work. Included in these tools is the ability to examine and critique literature to situate problems of practice within my place of employment, refine my ability to advocate for social justice and equity in education, collaborate with interdisciplinary practitioners, and develop my research capabilities through an iterative process.

As a result of this experience, I am able to examine literature in a manner is pertinent to problems I face as a practitioner. Using a critical lens, I have developed the ability to ask the right questions to find and define problems of practice worth solving. I have developed the skills to identify that these problems can originate inside or outside the organization and can be unique to

my place of practice or universal to other practitioners. By using literature and asking the right questions, these persistent problems can be solved through multiple iterations of improvement cycles. Access to a robust library of literature will be significantly reduced as my time as a student at the University of Pittsburgh comes to an end. I intend to use the problem-solving skills and critical lens of literature I developed in this program to navigate the post-doctoral environment.

My journey through the doctoral program has refined and reinvigorated my passion for social justice and equity in education. I have spent my professional career advocating for individuals with disabilities, and this program has inspired me to generalize my desire to create and sustain a bias-free and equitable environments for all individuals, not just a few served by a particular department. The interdisciplinary nature of the program at the University of Pittsburgh has allowed me to refine my collaborative problem-solving skills and do so in a way that is inclusive and respectful. By honoring and understanding our differences as practitioners as well as the stakeholders we serve, I understand the power of solving problems of practice using an interdisciplinary approach. My passion for creating and sustaining equitable and bias-free learning environments for all students has been strengthened by the interdisciplinary nature of this program.

Early in the first semester of my journey in this program, we were assigned to read *A More Beautiful Question* (2014) by Warren Berger. He shares a story about a graduation speech given by David McCullough in which he advised graduates, “Climb the mountain not to plant your flag, but to embrace the challenge, enjoy the air, and behold the view. Climb it so you can see the world, not so the world can see you,” (p. 181). For me, this doctoral experience was not about climbing to the top of the mountain, but learning how to become a mountain climber. The perseverance and determination that has brought me through this journey are the same characteristics needed to make transformative changes to our educational systems. This program

has solidified my commitment to making positive changes in our educational systems for a lifetime so that all of our students can become mountain climbers.

## **Appendix A Interview Protocol**

### **A.1 Teacher Protocol**

- How long have you been a teacher?
- How do you prepare for interviews?
  - How did your teacher preparation program prepare you for interviews?
  - What was most helpful?
  - Were there things that were suggested to you that you did not find to be true?
- Approximately how many interviews have you participated in?
- During your interview with the district, you were asked dispositional questions, which are intended to elicit one's values attitudes and beliefs.
  - These questions include a written response prior to the in-person interview and interview questions by the panel.
  - Did these questions allow you to express your values attitudes and beliefs during the interview?
- How did your interview with the district differ from others you've had?
  - How did the dispositional questions make you feel about the quality of your interview?
  - How did the dispositional questions make you feel about the district?
- Did you believe that you were able to convey your best version of your teaching abilities and character during your interview?
- How did you know this?

## **A.2 Administrator Protocol**

- How long have you been an administrator?
- How long have you been in your current position?
- How many years have you participated on hiring committees?
- Do you recall using dispositional hiring questions?
  - If so, how has it impacted your hiring decisions?
  - Why?
  - What made you feel that way?
- What values, attitudes, and beliefs are you looking for when you're hiring?
  - How do you uncover that during the interview?
  - Why is that important?
- Given the four dispositions (perception of self, perception of others, perception of purpose and general frame of reference, what has been your experience using dispositional questions during the interview?
- Do dispositions matter?
  - Are there some that are more important than others?
  - What about the interview helps you know that?
- Given dispositional, content, and pedagogical questions, how would you weight the importance of each?
- Can you think of a time when dispositions came into play when making a hiring decision?
- Are there dispositional questions that you find more beneficial than others?



- How helpful are the dispositional questions asked during the interview in your hiring decisions?
- Describe the difference in your hiring decisions before and after your use of dispositional interview questions.
- What tools or resources would support the districts hiring decisions?

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